

I strongly support the adoption of the OpenDocument file format as the official standard for storage, eFiling and other exchanges of common court documents, such as text files, spreadsheets, and images – whether those documents are intended for editing or not. There are three main reasons for this recommendation.

1. Adherence to open standards and the adoption of open source technologies are clearly in the public interest. Over the past several years there has been widespread and increasing world-wide support for these two practices, both by governments and by the private sector. Given that the OpenDocument format standard has been well-proven, both in concept and in actual practice, there is no longer any justification for public agencies to create dependencies on formats that favor the use of proprietary products for viewing and editing. Attorneys, individuals, and public agencies shouldn't need to purchase products like Microsoft's Office or Adobe Acrobat to make the job of dealing with government easier.
2. For those who have already standardized on MS Word, there is a free plug-in available from SourceForge.net that enables Microsoft Office 2003 to read and write OpenDocument files. Microsoft now provides those capabilities in Office 2007. For those not wishing to be dependent on expensive proprietary products, or whose purchasing policies discourage favoritism to any one vendor, there are excellent free software tools readily available that use ODF as their native format. State and local government agencies are all operating under severe budget constraints; and their use of open source software, such as OpenOffice.Org, can result in significant savings of scarce tax dollars.
3. In order to aid the sale of new product versions, Microsoft has changed its MS Word file formats repeatedly over the years, and Adobe did the same with PDF. While it is true that both of these companies have now opened their latest file formats to international standards bodies, for all practical purposes future versions will likely remain driven by those companies based on profit motives. Although the OpenDocument format was originally developed by Sun and then given to the ISO, Oracle, the current owner of Sun, has no significant revenue stream dependent on ODF. This means that the future evolution of the OpenDocument format will be primarily driven by the user community, and should remain a truly open standard.

Thank you for your consideration of my input.

Jack Feldhaus, Ph.D., Criminal Justice Computer Integration Project Manager for Yavapai County Arizona